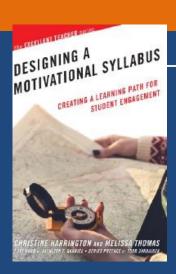# DESIGNING A MOTIVATIONAL SYLLABUS

**Christine Harrington, Ph.D.**
Associate Professor and Co-Coordinator,
Ed.D. in Community College Leadership
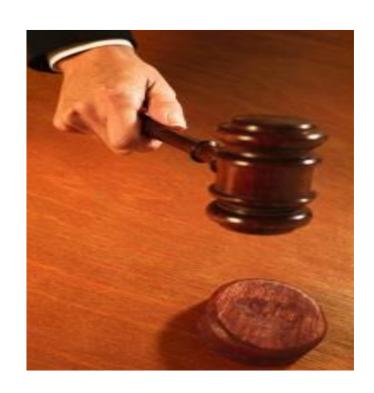New Jersey City University
www.scholarlyteaching.org

# What is the purpose of a Syllabus?

# Is the Syllabus a Contract?

No, it is not….

Harrington & Thomas (2018)

# Purpose of the Syllabus

**Communication Tool**

- Share overview of course
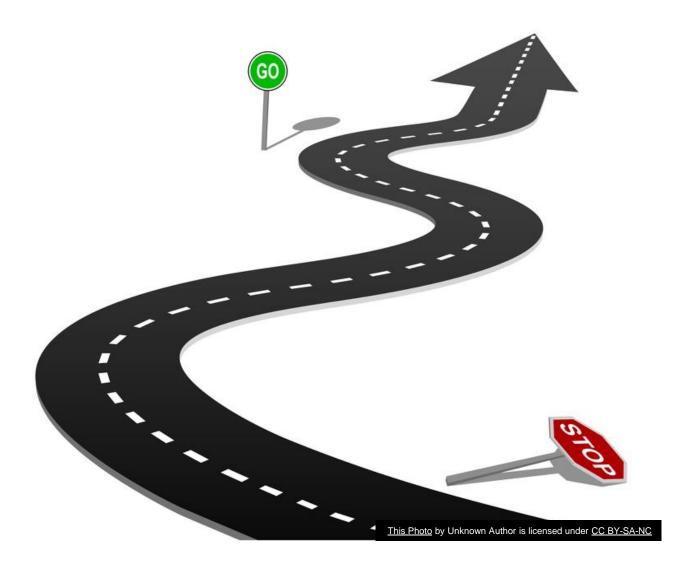- Prevent potential misunderstandings

**Planning Tool**

- Course learning outcomes
- Strategies to accomplish goals

**Motivational and Supportive Tool**

- Encourage and Guide Students
- Provide information and resources for success

Harrington & Thomas (2018)

# Transparent Expectations

# Structure and Success

**"The more structure, the better for all students. "**

**"Too little structure leaves too many students behind. "**

# Designing a Motivational Syllabus
## Harrington and Thomas (2018)

Provide

| Purpose and Details of Assignments |
| --- |
| Encouragement and Explicit Belief in Students |
| Overview of Support and How to Access Help |

# Syllabi:  An Equity Tool

"Syllabi exhibit equity-minded practices when they demystify taken-for-granted practices; welcome, demonstrate care for, validate, communicate a partnership with, and affirm the belonging of students from minoritized racial equity groups; and represent the experiences of racially minoritized students while also providing opportunities to deconstruct the presentation of white experiences as the taken-for-granted norm."

University of Southern California, http://cue-equitytools.usc.edu/section-2/4#section-2-recap

# Inclusive Content, Language, and Examples

# Choice

# Feedback
## Taras (2006)

Undergraduates do not get to benefit from feedback
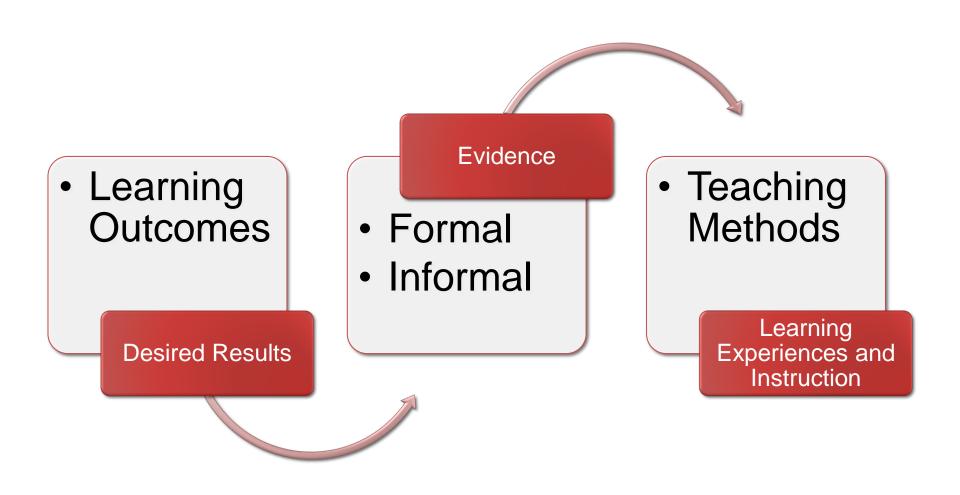
# The Syllabus as Course Design Tool?

- Learning Outcomes

Desired Results

Evidence
- Formal
- Informal

- Teaching Methods

Learning Experiences and Instruction

# Learning Outcomes



What do you want students to
know, think, or do?

# The Results!

| Course Objectives | Percent Recalled |
|---|---|
| One objective | **60%** |
| Two objectives | **8%** |
| More than 2 objectives | **3%** |
| No objectives | **Almost 30%** |

Smith & Razzouk, 1993

# An Example…

**Introductory Psychology Syllabus**

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will learn how to read and study psychology concepts effectively, maximizing learning efforts.
- Students will learn how to conduct effective literature searches.
- Students will effectively apply concepts learned to experiences or situations that are meaningful to him or her.
- Students will discover the relationships among psychology concepts.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast theories, research findings, and other psychological concepts.
- Students will be knowledgeable about cognitive processes such as critical thinking and decision making and will apply these concepts to himself or herself.
- Students will develop a passion for learning.
- Students will be enthusiastic about applying concepts learned to their own lives and the lives of others.
- Students will highly value the role of psychology in today's world.
- Students will understand the important role of culture in learning.
- Students will be able describe the different types of research methods used in the field of psychology.
- Students will be knowledgeable about the functions of the brain, the process of sensation

# A Better Example…

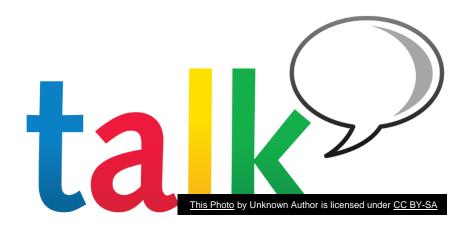**Introductory Psychology Syllabus**

**Learning Outcomes: What You Will Know!**

Upon successful completion of PSY 123, you will be able to:

1. Recognize psychological theories and concepts and will be able to summarize the contributions of psychologists.

2. Describe the various research methods and apply this knowledge to evaluate psychological research studies.

3. Articulate the importance and value of psychology in today's world.

4. Deliver clear and organized presentations and documents using APA style.

# Breakout Room

- How do you bring attention to the course learning outcomes and transparently communicate expectations?

# RESEARCH ON THE SYLLABUS (AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS!)

# What's Important in a Syllabus?

**Step 1**
- Reviewed 15 College Teaching Resources

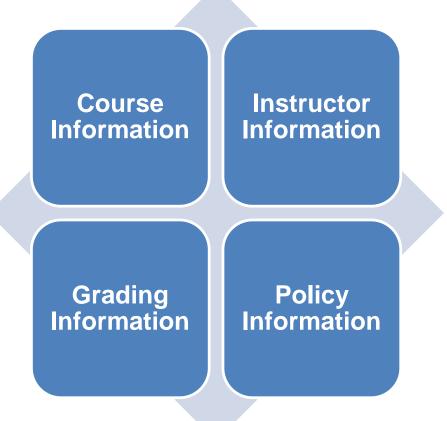**Step 2**
- Discovered 81 suggested components

**Results**
- A total of 24 components were identified by at least 50% of the resources

Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010

# Next Steps

Themes from 24 Components

**Course Information**

**Instructor Information**

**Grading Information**

**Policy Information**

Reviewed 1000 Syllabi (Google)

Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010

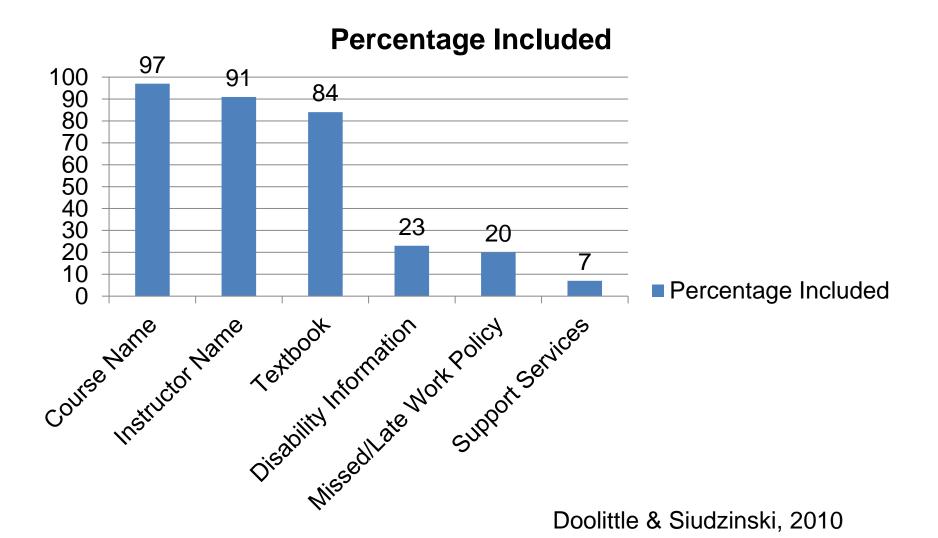# Prediction Time…

What percentage of faculty included:

- Late/Missed work policies
  - 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, 90% 100%

- Disability statements
  - 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, 90% 100%

- Information about supports available?
  - 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, 90% 100%

# What do faculty include?



**Percentage Included**

Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010

# What are the Essential Components of a Motivational Syllabus?

## Core Components

- Course Information
- Instructor Information
- Grading Information
- Policy Information

Refer to Syllabus Checklist

## Additional Components

- Welcome Statement
- Rationale for Assignments
- Grading Rubrics
- Accommodation Information
- Resources
- Tips for Success

# THE SYLLABUS AS A MOTIVATIONAL TOOL

# What Does the Syllabus Say About the Professor and the Course?

# Let's Talk Policy Language

- Dishonest
- Cheating/plagiarizing

**Positive**

- Academic Integrity
- Engaging in honest actions

**Negative**

# Grading Policies:
# Does the final grade tell the story of whether students achieved the learning outcomes?

# talk

**Breakout Room Conversation: Example Grading Policies**

NO MAKE UP EXAMS!!!

There will be 2 exams (each covering half of the semester) and a cumulative final exam. The lowest exam grade will be dropped.

If you miss an exam or assignment, you will have an opportunity during the last week of the semester to take a replacement exam.

Missed or late work will be accepted within one week of due date for up to half credit.

# Late Work Policies

Pasadena City College, Bombardier (2019)

# Late Work Options

## Low Stakes Only

- No late work on low stakes assignments

## Free Pass

- Give one or two opportunities for students to submit late work without penalty

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA

## Ask Yourself…

Harrington & Thomas (2018)

How does this policy affect the learning process and achievement of learning outcomes?

How does the policy affect different groups of students? Does it promote equity and fairness?
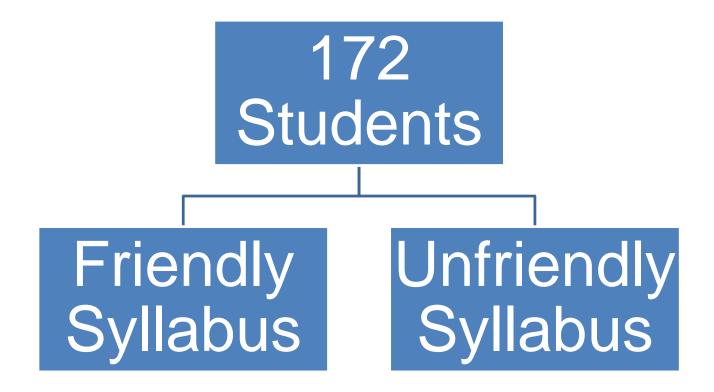
What messages do your policies send?

Where did this policy come from? What purpose does the policy serve? Is it necessary?

# Revising Policies

It is important to stay on track with your assignments and take exams on schedule; not only will this help you feel less stressed, but it is also an important skill you will need in your career.  Being able to meet deadlines and juggle many tasks is an important career and life skill.  Thus, it is expected that you will complete all assignments and exams according to the schedule.  If you have a personal situation that prevents you from doing so, please discuss this with me prior to the due date, if possible, so we can explore options.  It if is not possible to discuss prior to the due date, please reach out as soon as possible.  While effective time management is an essential skill, I understand that life circumstances can sometimes make this challenging or impossible.

Direct from Harrington & Thomas (2018)

# The Tone of the Syllabus

172 Students

Friendly Syllabus

Unfriendly Syllabus

Students thought they were evaluating an adjunct.

Harnish & Bridges, 2011

# Examples from Syllabus

### Unfriendly

- If you need to contact me outside of office hours, you may e-mail me….

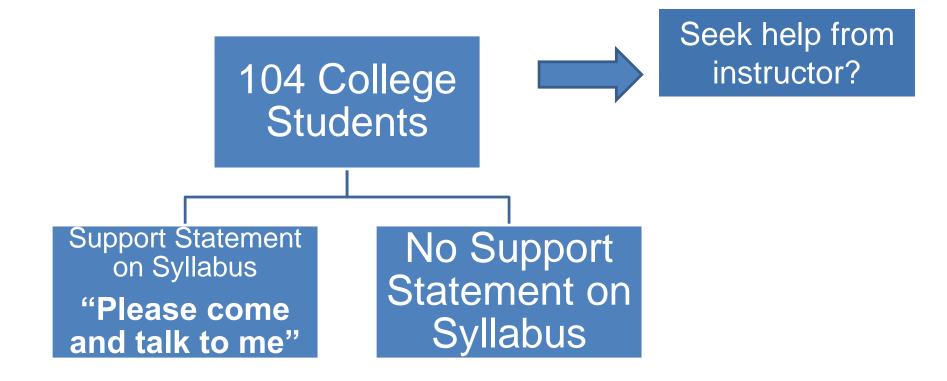- Come prepared to actively participate in this course. This is the best way to engage you in learning….

### Friendly

- I welcome you to contact me outside of class and student hours.  You may e-mail me….

- I hope you actively participate in this course. I say this because I found it is the best way to engage you in learning….

Directly quoted from Harnish and Bridges (2011)

# The Results!

| Topic | Friendly Average | Unfriendly Average |
|---|---|---|
| Approachability | 4.07 | 3.77 |
| Faculty Level of Motivation to Teach | 3.6 | 3.07 |
| Difficulty | 3.34 | 3.72 |

Harnish & Bridges, 2011

# The Power of 6 Words

**104 College Students** → Seek help from instructor?

Support Statement on Syllabus

**"Please come and talk to me"**

No Support Statement on Syllabus

Perrine, Lisle, & Tucker, 1995

# Results- Willingness to Seek Help

| Potential Problem | Supportive | Neutral |
|---|---|---|
| Trouble understanding textbook | 4.7 | 3.7 |
| Low grade on first exam | 4.8 | 4.0 |
| Hard to hear instructor's lectures | 4.4 | 3.8 |
| Study skills ineffective for course | 4.7 | 3.6 |
| Thinking about dropping course | 4.9 | 3.8 |
| Trouble understanding major topic | 5.3 | 4.2 |

All significantly different!

Perrine, Lisle, & Tucker, 1995

# Supportive Statements

**Please come and visit me!**

Welcome to the course!  I am excited to be your instructor and can't wait to get to know you. Throughout the semester, we will be talking about your goals and career plans and strategies that will help you be successful.  I hope that you will be view me as part of your support team.  In addition to teaching you research-based success strategies, I am here to help you plan for success, problem-solve as needed, and celebrate successful experiences.  My official office hours are listed above, but I'm more than happy to find a different day and time to meet if these do not work well for your schedule. I believe that it's really important for us to talk outside of class so please connect with me before or after class, stop by my office (or make an appointment), and e-mail me!

# What Information can Motivate Students?

# Campus Resources

## Available Help and Support:

Successful people access support from others as needed. Middlesex County College has many supportive services that can help you as you strive to achieve your goals. I encourage you to reach out to me or other professionals on campus. Here's some information about the resources available to you:

| | |
|---|---|
| Your Professor | E-mail me at charrington@middlesexcc.edu or stop by my office RH 111. |
| Librarians | The library offers assistance with finding and evaluating information. Visit the library, call 732.906.4253, or visit their website for online options. |
| Personal, Career, Transfer, and Disability Counselors | The Counseling and Career Services department offers confidential individual counseling and offers several workshops throughout the semester. Visit Edison Hall Room 100, call 732.906.2546, or visit their website for more information. |
| Tutors | The Johnson Commons Learning Center, located in IRC 241, offers support for developmental courses. Call 732.548.6000 X3222 or see website for details. The tutoring center, located in JLC 240, offers tutoring support in many subjects. Call 732.906.2631 or see website for details. |
| Academic Advisors | The Academic Advising Center offers drop-in advising services. Visit CH 109, call 732.906.2596, or visit their website. Full time students are also assigned an advisor. |

# Inviting Images



MIDDLESEX
COUNTY COLLEGE

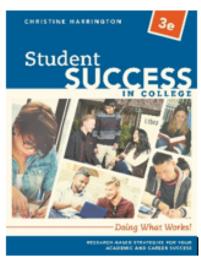Welcome to Student Success!

SSD 101-27

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00 -3:20 p.m. CB 119

Dr. Christine Harrington

charrington@middlesexcc.edu
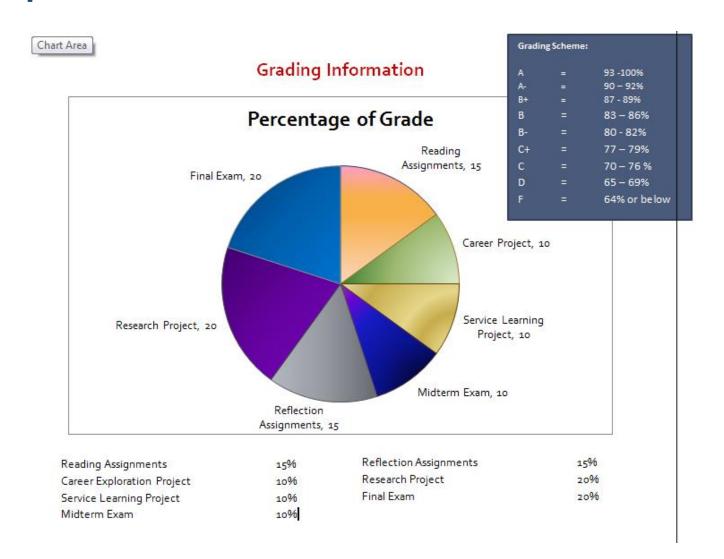
# Photo of Textbook, Use Color

**What book and other materials do I need?**



**Texts:** MINDTAP: Student Success in College: Doing What Works! 3rd edition, Cengage (Purchasing MindTap is required as several assignments will be completed in MindTap)

**Articles and Websites:** Several additional resources will be used. These will be posted in the Learning Management System.

# Graphs

# Rationale for Assignments

## Assignments:

### Academic Integrity Assignment:

To help you avoid unintentional dishonesty, all students are expected to view the Academic Integrity Narrated Power Point presentation (link also in Campus Cruiser) and take a 25 question on-line quiz in Campus Cruiser. You can take the quiz as many times as necessary but will need to achieve 100%!

### Reading Assignments:

To accomplish all of our learning goals, you will need to be engaged in lots of learning outside of the classroom. You will be expected to read the text and articles. To help you actively engage with the text, you will be completing reading assignments- typing answers to the questions posed (see back of syllabus). While we will be reviewing some of the concepts from the text in class, we will simply not have enough time to cover everything. As a future educator, all of the information is important!

### Quizzes:

Practicing retrieval is a very effective learning strategy. To maximize your learning experience, you will be taking a quiz on every chapter. Quizzes are online (in Campus Cruiser), open book, and are not timed. You can take each quiz up to three times (lots of retrieval practice!) and the highest score will count. These are called formative assessments – they are designed to help you learn.

### Presentations/Teaching Opportunities:

Since this is a course that is preparing you to become an educator, doing presentations is important! You will have the opportunity to do 2 presentations.

1. For one presentation, you will work with a few other students and will lead an exercise on one of the **research articles from the packet**.
2. For the other presentation (**literature review**), you will work in a small group of 3-5 students and you will review the research on an **educational topic** (topic must be approved). Your presentation will provide the class with an overview of this research along with the impact of these findings on the classroom. Note- this will be the topic for your paper too.

# Details about Assignments

## Power Point Slides Rubric
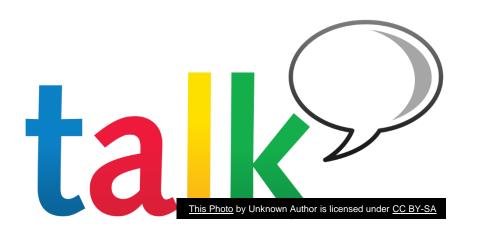
| Area | | |
|---|---|---|
| "A" Work (90-100%): | Visually effective slides. Images, charts, graphs, Smart Art were used to organize information. Grammatically correct, good organization, free of spelling errors, cited source appropriately<br><br>Completely described:<br><br>✓ **Introduction- Clear explanation of purpose of study and what question researchers were seeking an answer to**<br>✓ **Method- overview of how study was conducted; description of participants and what participants had to do**<br>✓ **Results- answer to research question; clear explanation of the key findings**<br>✓ **Discussion- description of value of study and how students can use this information to their advantage** | |
| "B" Work (80-89%) | • Well organized slides - grammatically correct, good organization, no more than a few spelling or grammar errors<br>• Addressed all areas above with general responses; not a lot of details provided<br>• Minimal use of visual tools such as Smart Art, graphs, images | |
| "C" Work (70-79%) | • Generally well organized, some spelling and grammar errors<br>• Answered most questions (bulleted above) with general responses; not a lot of details provided<br>• Little to no use of visual tools | |
| "D" or "F" Work (0- 69%) | • Not well organized, many spelling and grammar errors<br>• Did not answer most questions (bulleted above);<br>• Missed key research findings;<br>• Minimal or no details provided or use of visual images | |

# Application



- Syllabus is often first impression- especially if given out electronically before class

- Use Positive Language and Tone; Use "you" instead of "students"

- Use visual tools

- Provide helpful information and resources

# Breakout Room Conversation



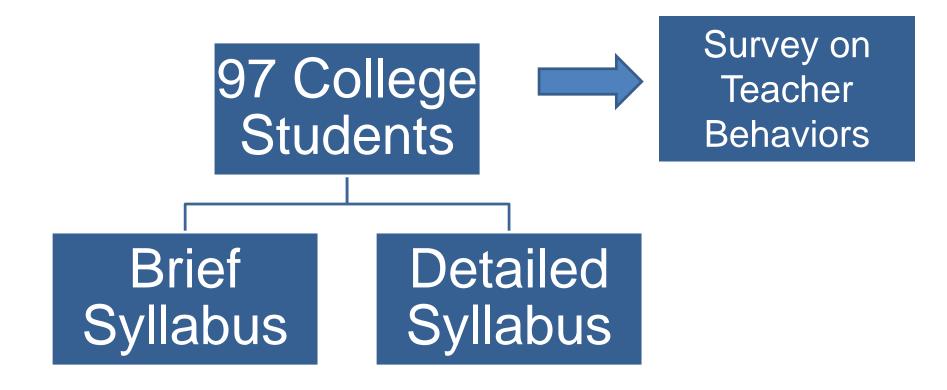This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA

- How do you (or can you) put these ideas into practice?
  - What visual tools can you incorporate into your syllabus?
  - What additional supportive statements or resources can you provide?

# How Long Should a Syllabus Be?

1-2 pages     3-5 pages     6-8 pages     9-14 pages     15 or more pages

# Exploring the Length of Syllabi



97 College Students → Survey on Teacher Behaviors

Brief Syllabus | Detailed Syllabus

Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010

# The Syllabus

### Brief Version- 2 pages

- Instructor name/contact information
- Course objectives
- Textbook
- Brief Overview of Assignments (ex. 6 exams)
- Grading distribution
- Brief overview of policies
- Calendar with due dates
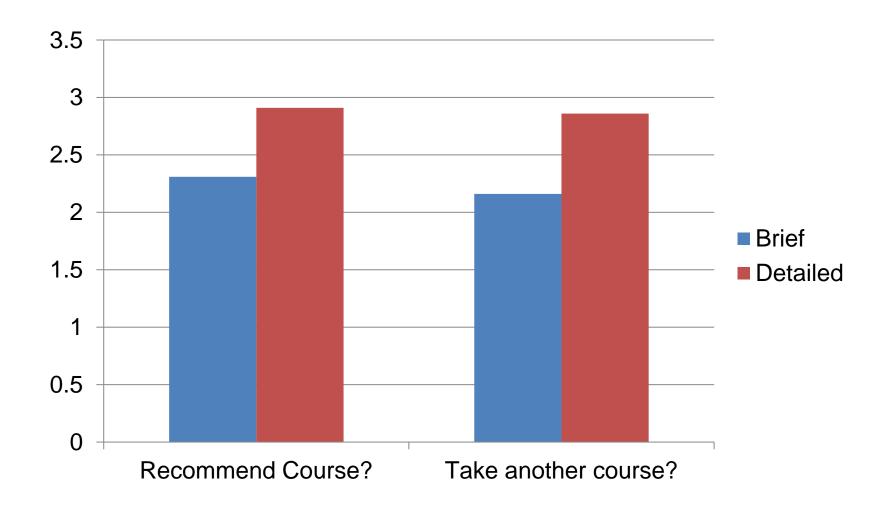
### Detailed Version- 6 pages

- Same information with more detail
  - 6 exams consisting of multiple choice and short answer questions
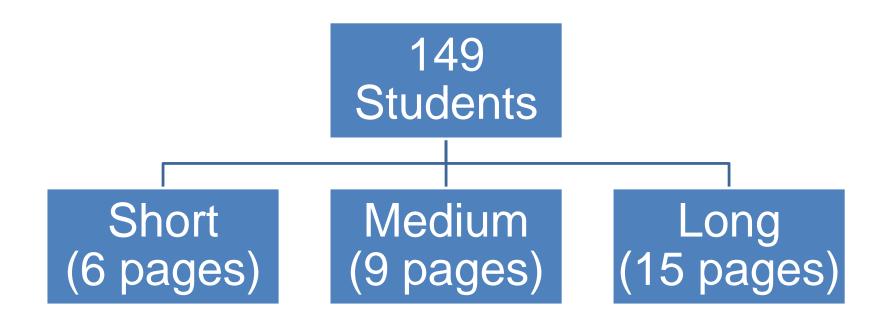  - Calendar included chapters that would be covered

# Results!

| Teacher Characteristic | Detailed | Brief |
|---|---|---|
| Approachable/personable | 3.17 | 2.55 |
| Creative/interesting | 3.45 | 2.64 |
| Effective communicator | 3.05 | 2.47 |
| Encouraging/cares for students | 3.12 | 2.13 |
| Enthusiastic | 3.60 | 2.41 |
| Flexible/open-minded | 2.97 | 2.41 |
| Knowledgeable | 3.75 | 2.97 |
| Prepared | 3.38 | 2.81 |
| Present current information | 3.53 | 2.50 |
| Promotes critical thinking | 3.50 | 2.88 |
| Realistic expectations/fair | 3.06 | 2.16 |

All significantly different!

Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010

# More Results



Saville, Zinn, Brown, & Marchuk, 2010

# **Syllabus Length**

```
                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │     149     │
                    │   Students  │
                    └──────┬──────┘
        ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────┐
┌───────┴───────┐  ┌───────┴───────┐  ┌───────┴────────┐
│     Short     │  │    Medium     │  │      Long      │
│  (6 pages)    │  │  (9 pages)    │  │  (15 pages)    │
└───────────────┘  └───────────────┘  └────────────────┘
```
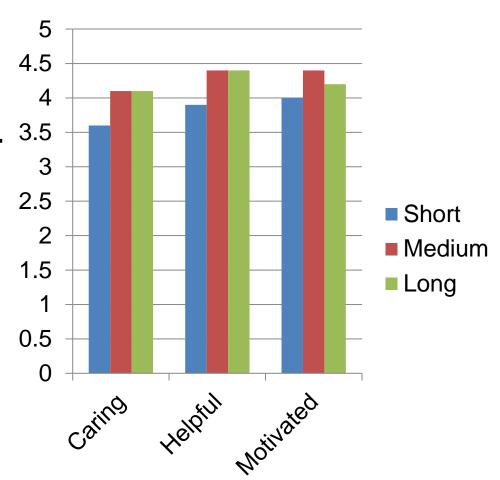
Harrington & Quillen 2015

# Results

**<u>Medium or Long Syllabus (compared to Short Syllabus):</u>**

- Professor more caring

- Professor more helpful

- More motivated



Harrington & Quillen 2015

## Short (with details later) or Long (with details included)?
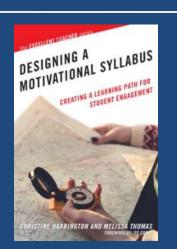
# 66% prefer the LONG SYLLABUS

# Application

- Add specific information – especially about course schedule and assignments (i.e. rubrics)

- All essential information is in one place

- Sends positive message about instructor, setting a positive tone for course

- Visual images, charts or tools- longer syllabus but perhaps better!

# What was your key take-away?

# THANK YOU AND BEST WISHES AS YOU DESIGN MOTIVATIONAL SYLLABI!

www.scholarlyteaching.org